

# AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

Literary Societies of Centenary College,

AT JACKSON, LA., ON THE 25TH JULY, 1854.

BY CHRISTIAN ROSELIUS.

PUBLISHED BY THE SOCIETIES

NEW ORLEANS:

PRINTED AT THE TRUE DELTA OFFICE.

1854.

PRESENTED TO CENTENARY COLLEGE BY  
REV. J. M. ALFORD, JULY 25 1854—ONE HUN-  
DRED YEARS AFTER DELIVERED AT SAID COLLEGE  
ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO TODAY







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GENTLEMEN :—Let me congratulate you on the flourishing condition and promising prospects of Centenary College. Though comparatively young in years, your *Alma Mater* has already taken a prominent position among the numerous academic institutions which are spread over our happy land. Many attempts have been made, within the last twenty-five years, to establish Colleges in various parts of the State, all of which have proved abortive, notwithstanding the lavish appropriations made by the Legislature for their support. This institution alone has been built upon a solid and permanent foundation by the disinterested exertions of the friends of education, without any aid from the public treasury. Here they have planted the tree of knowledge, and it has grown up, and extends its roots and branches, and is now bearing abundant fruit. The course of collegiate instruction in the different departments of learning and science, is thorough and complete, and the standard of scholarship is not inferior to that of any College in the Union. And all this has been accomplished in nine years! But, what is most gratifying of all—here she stands in her full and vigorous career of usefulness, self-sustained, without dolefully supplicating for rich endowments, or legislative succor.

The learned professors, to whose noble efforts this success is mainly attributable, have had to contend with many and formidable difficulties. An unaccountable prejudice pervaded, to a great extent, the public mind, founded on the erroneous supposition that our climate presented an insuperable obstacle to the establishment of collegiate institutions. This paradoxical statement was so often repeated, that it was received by many as an acknowledged truth. If any one not laboring under the influence of this singular hallucination, asked in what respect the mild and soul-inspiring climate of the sunny South, was uncongenial to the prosecution of serious



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studies in the higher departments of literature and science, he was told that the excessive heat of our summer months was too enervating to enable the student to direct his mental powers to abstruse and difficult subjects of inquiry. Hence it was concluded that scholarship could alone be attained in the frozen regions of the North; and that the genial current of the soul could only flow in the benumbing temperature of ice and snow. It was in vain to expose the fallacy of such reasoning, by a reference to the gigantic intellects produced and nurtured in Greece, Italy, and other southern climes. The prejudice was too deeply rooted to be eradicated in any other way than by ocular demonstration; and that demonstration, I am happy to say, is now before us. From this time forward it is to be hoped that the important and delicate trust of educating the sons of Louisiana, will not be confided to the hands of strangers, who have no community of feeling with, and little or no sympathy for them. Who can look with indifference, at the disgraceful scene displayed at the Law School at Cambridge, only a few weeks ago, when one of the Professors, Judge Loring, was hissed, by the Northern members of his class, for an independent and fearless discharge of his official duties, in upholding the majesty of the law, which an infuriated mob was attempting, by brutal violence, to trample under foot.

But the friends of liberal education, have, of late years, had to contend with a more general objection against the whole system of collegiate instruction and discipline. Those by whom this objection is made, insist that all the school-learning which it is necessary or useful to acquire, is—reading, writing and cyphering. The splendid triumphs of mechanical genius in the invention of labor-saving machinery, seem to have induced a belief, that the necessity of patient study and severe application, for the acquisition of mental treasures, could likewise be superseded by an equally astounding discovery of the long sought for Royal Road to knowledge. Nothing, indeed, was more natural than that, while indulging such wild and extravagant anticipations, it should be considered quite needless to enter the arena of toilsome competition, for moral excellence and mental distinction. The disciples of this new school of indolence and intuition, have laid the flattering unction to their souls, that in this age of rapid progress and miraculous enlightenment, every body is fit for every thing. They form that mushroom aristocracy, so graphically described by that blunt and brave old soldier, General Foy: "Aristocracy in the Nineteenth Century," he exclaims, "is the combination, or rather, the condition of those who would consume without producing, live without working; know everything without learning anything; wear



all the honors of the State without deserving them; and occupy all the offices of the government without being able to fill them." Can it be wondered at, that men entertaining such fantastic ideas, should be averse to foster and encourage collegiate institutions? and should, on the contrary, deride the advantages of a liberal education, as leading to no other results than impertinent self-conceit and ridiculous pedantry? ✓

As these superficial and erroneous views are very extensively entertained, it cannot be amiss, on this interesting occasion, to select, as the subject of our address, the general advantages, and for the proper discharge of many of the most important duties of social and political life, the absolute *necessity* of high classical and scientific attainments. I am well aware that in the selection of this topic for discussion, I place myself in the predicament of one who tells a thrice told tale; nevertheless, I crave your kind indulgence, and trust that you will favor me with your patient attention, while I make a feeble but earnest appeal to your judgment and patriotism in favor of academic instruction.

The question has been sneeringly asked, of what practical benefit is the knowledge of Greek and Latin, and the higher branches of mathematics to those who do not intend to enter the learned professions? Persons who propound such questions, seem to have lost sight of the fact, that the great and paramount object of education is, the development and strengthening of the powers of the mind; and that that important end can only be attained by exercising and disciplining the mental faculties. Now every one who has bestowed the least consideration on the subject, must know that nothing is better calculated to fix the attention, and to induce thought and reflection, than the study of the dead languages, and the mathematics. Indeed it is obvious, that not one step can be taken in these studies, without bringing nearly all the mental powers into active operation. It is therefore manifest, that, without insisting, for the present, at all, on the manifold other advantages resulting from a proficiency in classic literature, and the mathematical and natural sciences, the study of these branches of knowledge is, at any rate, of incalculable benefit as the means of accomplishing the great end of education—the improvement of the mind.

One of the most beneficial effects produced by collegiate institutions, is to spread more widely the love of learning, a reverence for morality and virtue, and to diminish the indulgence of sensual and vulgar gratifications; and thus to counteract, in some measure, the tendency of the utilitarian age in which we live, of reducing everything to the standard of practical results, appreciable in dollars and cents—a tendency which is sapping the



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very foundation of the social edifice. What an alarming spectacle is exhibited to the contemplation of the patriot, the philanthopist and the christian, by the startling disclosures of the stupendous frauds, lately perpetrated in the city of New York! Millions of dollars of the just and hard-earned rewards of industry, frugality and economy, have been swept away by the villainy of those in whom trust had been reposed, and who had been considered as worthy of unlimited confidence. The perpetrators of these crimes are all men moving in what are called the higher circles of society; their misdeeds have been exposed to the broad glare of day; their guilt has been made manifest; and yet, thus far, no step has been taken to bring them to punishment:

“ We have seen corruption boil and bubble,  
'Till it o'er-run the stew: laws for all faults,  
But faults so countenanc'd, that the strong statutes  
Stand like the forfeits in a barber's shop—  
As much in mock as mark.”

Can there be the shadow of a doubt that this deplorable state of morals is attributable to that predominant passion for money, and its attendants—extravagant luxury and unbounded profligacy? The corroding influence of this passion stifles every virtuous aspiration of the soul; it drowns the still small voice of conscience by its clamorous demands for wealth and ostentation. Is it not incumbent then, on every one whose heart has not been contaminated by the baneful effects of this all-absorbing passion, to strain every nerve and use every effort, to stem, if possible, this torrent of corruption, by awakening and cultivating a taste for the higher and more enobling pursuits and enjoyments of man, as a moral, intellectual, accountable and immortal being? A consummation so devoutly to be wished, can only be brought about by giving a different direction and a healthier tone to public opinion. That the co-operation and instrumentality of literary institutions, in the great work of moral reformation, is of the greatest importance, must be obvious to every reflecting mind. The intellectual atmosphere by which they are surrounded, exercises its silent but irresistible influence in a great variety of ways, not only on their alumni, but on the whole community. Among other things, it creates, as it were, a taste for reading; the beneficial results of which, I cannot better describe than by quoting the eloquent language of Sir John Herschel. He observes, in an address to the subscribers of the Windsor and Eton Public Library, delivered in 1833—“If I were to pray for a taste which should stand me in



stead under every variety of circumstances, and be a source of happiness and cheerfulness to me through life, and a shield against its ills, however things might go amiss, and the world frown upon me, it would be a taste for reading. I speak of it, of course, only as a worldly advantage, and not in the slightest degree as superseding or derogating from the higher office, and surer and stronger panoply of religious principles—but as a taste, an instrument, and a mode of pleasurable gratification. Give a man this taste, and the means of gratifying it, and you can hardly fail of making a happy man, unless, indeed, you put into his hands a most perverse selection of books. You place him in contact with the best society in every period of history—with the wisest, the wittiest—with the tenderest, the bravest, and the purest characters that have adorned humanity. You make him a denizen of all nations—a cotemporary of all ages. The world has been created for him. It is hardly possible but the character should take a higher and better tone from the constant habit of associating in thought, with a class of thinkers, to say the least of it, above the average of humanity. It is morally impossible but that the manners should take a tinge of good breeding and civilization, from having constantly before one's eyes the way in which the best bred and the best informed men have talked and conducted themselves in their intercourse with each other. There is a gentle but perfectly irresistible coercion in a habit of reading, well directed, over the whole tenor of a man's character and conduct, which is not the less effectual, because it works insensibly, and because it is really the last thing he dreams of. It cannot, in short, be better summed up, than in the words of the Latin poet—

*"Emollit mores, nec sinit esse ferus."*

It civilizes the condition of men, and suffers them not to remain barbarous."

It is said that wisdom does not speak to her followers in Latin, Greek and Hebrew only, but that she teaches her sublime lessons in the pages of Shakespeare, Milton, Jeremy Taylor, and a brilliant constellation of other authors, who have all written in our own nervous vernacular. This is true. But let me ask what class of readers nourish their minds with the strong healthy and invigorating food set before them by these writers? Certainly not those whose taste has been cloyed, and whose powers of digestion have been enfeebled, if not entirely destroyed, by feeding on the pap and sweetmeats of most of the popular authors of the day. Not one reader in a thousand who pores with delight over the glittering inanities of Bulwer, or the rapid sentimentalities of James, will ever venture to read a hundred



lines of the *Paradise Lost*, or a single scene of *Hamlet*! There is a craving and insatiable appetite for novelty, which is constantly increased by the trash it feeds on. How can this mental malady be cured, unless it be by forming the taste and judgment of the youthful student, by a careful study and contemplations of the great models of antiquity? In them alone do we find that wonderful artistic perfection which the moderns have attempted to imitate in vain. Homer as a poet, Demosthenes as an orator, and Thucydides as an historian, still stand, each in his own department, in solitary grandeur, unrivaled and unapproachable. "The poems of Homer," says Dr. Johnson, "we yet know not to transcend the common limits of human intelligence, but by remarking that nation after nation, and century after century, has been able to do little more than transpose his incidents, new-name his characters, and paraphrase his sentiments."

The pernicious consequences of a depraved taste in literature, are as apparent in the formation of the moral character, as the destructive effects of the same disease, with regard to our food, is visible on our physical frame. By the munificence of the late John Jacob Astor, one of the most valuable and extensive public libraries has been established in the city of New York. It contains the best and most complete collection of books in the various departments of literature and science. A gentleman had the curiosity, some time ago, to ask Dr. Cogswell, the learned and intelligent librarian, what description of books were most inquired after? The answer was—such as treat of heraldry! Yes, heraldry—the absurd offspring of the stupid ignorance, the brutal barbarism and the cruel despotism of the dark feudal ages, occupies the minds of republican American citizens in the Nineteenth Century, to the exclusion of more serious and useful inquiries! And, let me ask, to what cause is this frivolity—nay, this imbecility of mind, attributable? In a great measure, if not entirely, to that perversion of taste of which we are speaking. How is this state of things to be changed? I repeat, by a severe and thorough moral and mental culture of the rising generation.

We have heard a great deal said in certain quarters, of the danger of over-educating the people; it is said that "where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise;" that if the mass of the community contract a taste for the pleasure of polite and elegant literature, and the pursuit of scientific inquiries, they will beget habits of idleness, and be longing after literary ease. Every candid observer of society knows full well that it is not true that ignorance can ever be conducive to true happiness in any condition of life; that, on the contrary, it is the source of most of the misery by which



humanity is afflicted. What are the amusements of the ignorant? They must necessarily consist, and be limited, in a great measure, to the gratification of the sensual appetites, the inevitable consequences of an abuse of which are a debilitated body and a depraved heart. Nearly all the avenues to the higher enjoyments of the soul are closed up to the ignorant; they look with a vacant stare at the wonderful and beautiful works of an all-wise Creator; their eyes cannot understandingly behold the admirable harmony of nature; nay, the greatest of all blessings vouchsafed to man—the inestimable comforts and consolation of religion, cannot be enjoyed and appreciated by them to the same extent as those whose mental faculties and moral perceptions have been awakened and sharpened by education and religious training. And yet we hear intelligent persons talk of the danger of over-educating the people. Let me ask, what would become of our liberty, our admirable system of government, and our glorious Union, if it was not for the education and intelligence of the people? Destroy these and the beautiful fabric will crumble in the dust, and like “an insubstantial pageant faded, leave not a rack behind.” Look at the pages of history, and by whose instrumentality has human freedom been invariably crushed, and despotism and oppression established in its place? By the ignorant masses of the people, led on by designing and unscrupulous demagogues. Take, as an illustration of this position, the last French revolution, or as it is called, the *coup d'état* of Louis Napoleon Bonaparte. Here we see the President of a Republic, elected by his fellow citizens, sworn to support that constitution from which alone he derived his power, deliberately commit perjury, murder and treason, and thereby constitute himself the master of the very people whose servant he had been; and the stupid populace shout, and assist in riveting the chains by which they are enslaved. Would any President of the United States, however daring and ambitious he might be, ever dream of such an act of usurpation, even if he had an army of five hundred thousand soldiers at his command? Certainly not! for he would know that the majority of the people who had elevated him to the highest office in their gift, are too well educated and too intelligent to be made tools of in his hands for the destruction of their own freedom; that, understanding and appreciating their liberty, the first act of usurpation would be visited by the most condign punishment, not by the assassin's dagger, but by the awful decree of the violated majesty of the law.

It is true that, from the organization of society, and the pursuits of the great majority of the people, the direct advantages of a liberal education can be enjoyed, comparatively, only by a few. There are now in the



United States one hundred and nineteen chartered colleges, in which there are about twelve thousand students. This certainly is but a small number for a population of twenty millions of souls. But the happy influence exercised by them upon the complicated relations and ramifications of social life, is unlimited and indefinite in its extent. After the student takes leave of the academic shades of his *alma mater*, he enters on the active scenes of the busy world, conscious that, with the assistance of a kind and merciful Providence, he is prepared for the battle of life; that whatever duties, either public or private, may devolve upon him, however arduous and difficult they may appear, he can discharge them with credit to himself and advantage to his fellow citizens. Whether called upon to expound and enforce the great truths of the gospel from the sacred desk; to dispense justice from the judgment seat; to open the arcana of nature for the purpose of alleviating the sufferings of humanity; to stand forth the bold champion of his country's cause; or in whatever other relation he may be placed, he can prepare himself for a proper discharge of its duties by directing and concentrating the powers and energies of his mind to the particular subjects which it is necessary to master. His mental horizon has been enlarged; the mist by which it was obscured has been dispelled; and, he can, with comparative ease, survey and explore the whole field of his future labors.

It would, however, be a fatal error, if the youthful student was to suppose that his collegiate education supersedes the necessity of further exertion. On the contrary, if he has really profited by his instruction, he knows that there are no substantial engagements, no permanent pleasures, except those procured by labor; that the idle man's brain is the devil's workshop; and that action—unintermitted action, is the true law of our nature. He knows too, that no great end can be obtained without correspondingly great exertions. What do we admire in the lives of the great and good, whose deeds have been immortalized and transmitted to posterity by the pen of the historian, the orator and the poet? Is it their gorgeous magnificence, their wasteful luxury, or their inglorious inactivity? No: these things are universally considered as presenting the weak sides of their characters. What we admire, and desire to imitate, is their indomitable energy, their indefatigable activity, and their glorious deeds, achieved for the good of their country. And when we consider the relative prosperity and happiness of the people of different countries, we invariably find that wherever we meet with an active, frugal and industrious population, that country is happy and prosperous, whatever may be the barrenness and unproductiveness of its soil; as for instance, in many parts of the New England States;



and, on the other hand, wherever ignorance, indolence and idleness prevail, there are found their concomitants, abject poverty and squalid misery, notwithstanding the profusion with which bountiful nature scatters abroad her spontaneous productions; as is many parts of Mexico and South America. It is manifest then, that it is only by labor, directed by intelligence, knowledge and virtue, that man can accomplish those high destinies placed within his reach by his Creator—happiness in this life, and a proper preparation for that to come.

An all wise Providence has ordained that, no matter in what situation we may be placed, our whole career shall be a constant struggle; we are beset on all sides by difficulties; and, the most formidable obstacle to success, arises from the exaggerated ideas we form of the nature of the difficulties with which we have to cope; the timid and weak mind shrinks back from the encounter of any, even the slightest difficulty, and, in imagination, converts it at once into an impossibility. "To be weak is miserable, doing or suffering;" but the man whose mind has been invigorated by a course of severe moral and mental culture, is not so liable to be overpowered by that timidity and weakness to which we have just alluded. He will look the difficulty, however great it may appear, boldly in the face, and adopt the most efficacious means to surmount it. Instead of being discouraged or disheartened, he will exclaim, with Mr. Warren: "What is difficulty? Only a word indicating the degree of strength requisite for accomplishing particular objects; a mere notice of the necessity for exertion; a bug-bear to children and fools; an effective stimulus to men." And he will also say, after Edmund Burke: "Difficulty is a severe instructor, set over us by the supreme ordinance of a parental guardian and legislator, who knows us better than we know ourselves, as he loves us better, too. *Pater ipsi colendi haud facilem esse viam voluit.* He that wrestles with us, strengthens our nerves and sharpens our skill; our antagonist is our helper. This amicable contest with difficulty, obliges us to an intimate acquaintance with our subject, and compels us to consider it in all its relations; it will not suffer us to be superficial." A character thus formed in the school of christian philosophy, is endowed with a fortitude and self-reliance, which the buffets and vicissitudes of fortune cannot shake; in prosperity his head will not become dizzy; in adversity his heart will not despond; in the former he will not give vent to his vanity and folly by an ostentatious display of wealth; and in the latter he will not resort to the brandy bottle to drown his sorrow.

Time will not allow to dwell more at large on the general advantages of



collegiate education. I have only glanced at some of them—the subject is by no means exhausted. Nor is it necessary before this enlightened audience to enter into elaborate vindication of the claims of our colleges and universities to the encouragement and support of the community. The lively interest evinced by the sparkling eyes and intelligent countenances of the mothers and daughters of the land, in the prosperity of Centenary College, is the surest indication of their sympathy and good wishes; and when these are enlisted in the success of such an enterprise, it cannot but be successful.

But we are called upon to foster liberal education by a still higher motive—imperious necessity. There are many of the most important duties of social life, for the proper discharge of which it is an indispensable qualification. Take, for instance, the office of Judge in the highest Court of Appeals, will any candid man pretend that reading, writing and cyphering, are the only requisites to enable the incumbent to comprehend a system of laws derived from the Roman, Spanish and French jurisprudence? How can he obtain any knowledge of the origin, history, development and modifications of the great and complicated principles of the legal science, when the sources of information on these subjects must be forever sealed to him? If a man with such slender qualifications should ever be placed on the bench, he would be compelled, notwithstanding the best and purest intentions, to grope his way in the dark; and instead of administering even-handed justice, his decisions would depend, in a great measure, on chance; they would be inconsistent, contradictory, and often in direct violation of the plainest principles—the public would lose all confidence and respect for his exposition and application of the law. The absolute and indispensable necessity of high classical and scientific attainments, as a qualification for the proper discharge of many of the important duties imposed by the complex relations of society, might be illustrated by a variety of examples equally opposite as that just cited. But it is needless, for they will at once present themselves to your own minds. Indeed the pressure of this necessity is felt and acknowledged in every department of intellectual labor; the splendor of genius itself is no exemption from it. Listen to the testimony of one of the most brilliant intellects that has ever illuminated the literary horizon—Walter Scott. In an auto-biographical sketch of his own youth, he feelingly observes: “If it ever should fall to the lot of youth to peruse these pages, let such readers remember, that it is with the deepest regret that I recollect in my manhood the opportunities of learning which I neglected in my youth; that through every part of my literary career, I have



felt pinched and hampered by my own ignorance; and I would, at this moment, give half the reputation I have had the good fortune to acquire, if by doing so, I could rest the remaining part upon a sound foundation of learning and science."

Reference is frequently made, by those who take the opposite view of this subject, to instances of what are called self-made men, for the purpose of proving that a liberal education is not an essential requisite for the attainment of intellectual distinction. We are told that the Bard of Avon "had little Latin, and less Greek;" that Robert Burns was a peasant; that Pope was the best Greek scholar of his age, and has translated the sublime poetry of Homer into English, with all the vigor and freshness of the original, yet he never was inside of a college. All this is true, and other examples might be added to the list. But, allow me to ask, what does this prove against the correctness of the propositions which we have been endeavoring to establish? There are exceptions to all general rules, and one of the most familiar maxims of logic is, that the exception proves the rule. Now, that we meet occasionally with a mind so happily organised, and endowed with such a degree of energy and will, as to grapple successfully with the disadvantages of a neglected or stunted education, and "climb the steep where Fame's proud temple shines afar," does surely not prove any thing against the benefits and necessity of collegiate instruction and discipline. Besides, who can tell, except those that have gone through the ordeal, by what privation, labor and application, such persons have been enabled to travel over the rugged paths to knowledge, and thereby provide something like a substitute for early and regular training? And how many have ever been successful in the attempt? Not one in ten thousand.

Those of you, gentlemen, who are about to bid farewell to these halls, hallowed by so many delightful associations and reminiscences, and who have laid the foundation of learning and science, must bear in mind that the superstructure remains to be raised; and that in that part of the building, you must be your own architects. Your *fair mother* has fitted you out for the stormy and boisterous voyage of life, by bestowing upon you her most precious gifts, which, if properly used, will enable you to escape the rocks and quicksands by which it is beset. No matter in what situation your future lot may be cast, you will keep in warm and grateful recollection her maternal care and affection; and by your character and conduct show that you are worthy to be numbered among her sons. Let your motto be *Quicquid vult, id valde vult*. A strong will and a firm determination almost always accomplish their object. "A conviction," says the



late John Foster, "that he understands, and that he wills with extraordinary force, silences the conceit that intended to perplex or instruct him. There is a feeling, as in respect to Fate, that the decrees of so inflexible a spirit *must* be right, or that, at least, they will be accomplished." It is equally indispensable to success, that the end we wish to attain should be constantly kept before our mind's eye, and should be pursued with undivided and unflagging energy. No opportunity should be left unimproved; every advantage followed up by increased exertion. There ought to be no loitering on the road, but the journey steadily proceeded in until the goal is attained.

"There is a tide in the affairs of men,  
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune:  
Omitted, all the voyage of their life  
Is bound in shallows, and in miseries;  
And we must take the current when it serves,  
Or lose our ventures."

Our mental faculties may be compared to the rays of the sun, whose warmth has no great intensity when diffused over a wide surface; but by concentrating them into one focus, the heat produced will set the world in a blaze.

If you are actuated by these principles, and have an implicit, unwavering reliance on the protection and assistance of an over-ruling Providence, you will be blessed by contented minds and clear consciences; you will realize the anxious hopes and fond anticipations of those whose love and affections are garnered up in you; you will acquire the esteem and respect of all good men; and as time rolls on, your memories will recur with pleasing retrospect to the happy days you have passed in the quiet and delightful shades of this institution—and as an act of filial gratitude, perform an annual pilgrimage to the shrine of learning and science, to participate in the intellectual jubilee of Commencement Day.









